

# Toward a Radical Eco-feminism

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It is one year after the Chernobyl melt-down. As I contemplate the movement of radioactive particles still percolating into the water table and entering into the bodies of those far and near, I cannot help but wonder how we reached this appalling condition. It has become clear to me that we are living out the chilling implications of one of man's most horrible fantasies. We have arrived at a point where confidence in the infallibility of human reason is so great that we build deadly technologies which have the capacity to end all life on the planet unless they are held in check by human reason and control. We are witnesses of a world which embodies man's original fantasy of controlling the 'forces' of nature. In the nuclear age, man lives out his fantasy of control by controlling the very possibility of the planet's extinction.

Feminism, with its analysis of hierarchy and misogyny, has contributed greatly to our understanding of the origins of the present social and ecological crisis. From the earlier liberal phases through to the radical, and cultural phases, feminists have offered distinctive analyses and solutions to the 'problem' of women's exclusion from the building of patricentric culture. Presently, the need for a new wave of feminism has become apparent to women interested in developing a truly ecological theory and praxis for a feminist program. Such a theory would use critique as a tool to propel the body of feminist thought into a new phase which will finally resolve the underlying dualisms between culture and nature which linger within much of feminist theory. By addressing the question of freedom and necessity in nature, I intend to draw out the implicit nature philosophies within liberal and cultural feminisms, making explicit their positions on the relationship between culture and nature. Exploring the implications of an implicit, 'necessitarian' view of nature will open up the possibility of developing a radically new way of looking at nature as a whole. This project is essential for theorists interested in creating a movement that wishes to espouse a truly liberatory view of human nature. It is in the interest of

liberating female human nature that I now turn to the question of freedom and necessity in feminist theory, making an appeal to feminists to critically examine the nature philosophies inherent in their own theories, and to consider the value of adopting a radical, ecological perspective.

Western man's attempt to place this 'realm of necessity' called nature under strict human control is embodied in Western religion, science, and philosophy. Each discipline holds that nature is a world separate from man, that it is a 'realm of necessity' which man must control, order, understand, and finally transcend. As Murray Bookchin has shown in his essay, 'Freedom and Necessity in Nature', the Victorian concept of a strictly necessitarian nature emerged out of a profound dualism between nature and culture. This underlying dualism has historically spawned a constellation of other dualistic splits such as spirit-matter, male-female, and subject/object.<sup>1</sup> All of these dualisms are reinforced by the belief that there exists a necessitarian nature which is separate from culture.

Dualism as a mode of ordering the world has lethal implications. It is a cognitive mode in which human beings reduce the complexity of their cognitions to such a degree that the intricate, mediated complexity of the natural world becomes reduced to just so many sets of polarized and antagonistic pairs of opposite phenomena. Dualism implies a 'divide and conquer' mentality in which, after dividing the many interconnected, mediated phenomena of the world into pairs of polarized opposites, one then assigns values to each component of the pair. In so doing, one may then justify the domination of the 'more desirable' of the pair over the 'less desirable'. In this way, dualism sets the stage for hierarchy and domination. For example, if we divide up the world of black, white, and all the infinite shades of grey in between into a simple world of black and white, and if we then assign the value of 'bad' to black and 'good' to white, then the domination of black by white becomes 'justifiable'.

However, dualism *per se* is not the only cognitive mode which has lethal social and theoretical implications. As Bookchin has pointed out, reductionism is perhaps an even larger concern for eco-feminist theorists today. Deep ecology, which is currently influencing many eco-theorists, has given sway to the tendency to reduce the complexity of the natural and social worlds to simplistic, monistic categories. This reductionist tendency acts as a lubricant for the smooth functioning of the systems theory some of them have so wholeheartedly embraced.

Dualism and reductionism, in fact, are usually deeply entangled with each other. A crude dualism tends to foster its counterpart in an equally crude monism, one that simplifies all of reality into a single,

often homogeneous, agency, force, substance, or energy source. Hegel caustically called this "a night in which all cows are black."<sup>1</sup> [...] Reductionism emerges from ways of thinking that are no less mechanistic, instrumental, and analytical than the hypothetico-deductive mentality that has assumed such supremacy over the past two centuries of Western thought.<sup>2</sup>

For eco-feminism, an understanding of the origins of domination and hierarchy is essential. It is because a dualistic, reductionistic, and exclusively necessitarian view of nature has been used by Western man to legitimate the domination of women and nature that I will now turn to the question of freedom and necessity in nature. In order to reveal the illegitimacy of this domination, we must first expose and dispel the myth of natural law which so depends on dualistic and reductionistic modes of thinking for its own articulation. To dispel the myth of natural law, we must 'radicalize' our view of nature, to use Bookchin's expression, by thinking ecologically. A 'necessitarian' view of nature sees nature as mute, passive and bound exclusively by necessary, inextricable physical laws. A radical view of nature, in contrast, regards nature as active, participatory, and continually engaged in an ongoing process of development out of which emerges ever increasing levels of complexity and diversity. Further, a radical view of nature goes beyond the nature/culture dualism by regarding nature and culture not as separate from each other, but as existing on a developmental continuum in which culture is the realization of the potentiality for subjectivity latent within nature. When regarded this way, we may radicalize our view of culture as well. We may see the possibility within culture for actualizing dimensions of freedom and subjectivity historically latent within non-human nature. By recognizing nature as a realm of potential freedom, we will radicalize our notion of the relationship between culture and nature. Ultimately, this will deepen our understanding of the relationship between women and nature and will open the way to explore the ground for developing an objective eco-feminist ethics.

Previous and current feminist theoretical tendencies have not yet radicalized their concepts of nature. Although most feminists would deny that they subscribe to a necessitarian, indeed hierarchical view of nature, a dualistic quietism still haunts much of feminist theory. This quietism is often not even deliberate; rather, it is caused by the failure of most current social theorists to recognize and articulate the implicit nature philosophies which inform their social philosophies. Eco-feminism must challenge this quietism by drawing out and critically examining these implicit nature philosophies which are often the vestigial inheritance of the misogynist and nature-hating 'academy' which has emerged

out of this hierarchical society. By extending Bookchin's extremely innovative concept of nature as a realm of potential freedom to a feminist critique, we will open up the possibility for a 'radical eco-feminism'. Such a critique will dissolve the narrow necessitarian view of nature in feminist theory by proposing a theory and a politics which are committed to a radical, liberatory view of the natural world, a world not completely bound by the fetters of natural law.

It is impossible to explore the question of freedom and necessity in feminist theory without first analyzing the distinctive shifts in feminist thinking on gender and natural law occurring in past and current feminist theory. Early liberal feminists maintained that women's oppression stems from the very belief that gender is determined by natural law. Many of today's 'cultural feminists', however, uphold the belief that gender is determined by natural law and maintain that women's oppression stems from the patricentric negation of female values derived from natural law.

While exploring the differences between liberal and cultural feminisms, one must remember that these two theoretical tendencies are in no way monolithic, theoretical schools of feminist theory.<sup>3</sup> While I recognize the crudeness and the limitations of these labels which cannot adequately reflect the diversity and integrity of feminist theoretical work, I find them useful in my attempt to identify two distinct attitudes in feminist theory regarding the relationship between gender and natural law. When critiquing such theorists, I am not interested in nihilistically throwing away any liberal or cultural feminist 'babies' with their bathwater. Rather, my intention is to improve the quality of the bathwater so that the baby may profit from the bath that much more.

Although both liberal and cultural feminist theoretical tendencies offer very different analyses of women's relationship to patricentric culture, they both share the dualistic view that culture stands in opposition to a harshly necessitarian nature. For the liberal feminist, culture is the vehicle by which humankind may transcend both our internal and our external natures. Culture is the domain of freedom, an enterprise which delivers us from the realm of a necessitarian nature bound by natural law.

Feminist Simone de Beauvoir represents the forebear of this tendency which I will call liberal feminism. In her book *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir presents a model of a world in which woman will gain freedom and equality with men when she has learned to transcend the world of natural law. For de Beauvoir, women's anatomy, social position and psychology spring from our identification with a necessitarian nature beyond which we may develop. Women's identification with nature reflects an underdeveloped state of 'immanence' which women

will overcome when we transcend the laws of the natural world by participating in the building of culture.

For de Beauvoir, the 'masculine world' is the world of male culture and it is precisely this culture which represents the realm of freedom. According to her theory, a feminist program should spell out the means by which women may gain access to this realm of masculine freedom, be it through birth control, abortion, or employment. Anything which obstructs women's entry to the male world of productivity should be eliminated. 'In order to be a complete individual, on an equality with men, women must have access to the masculine world.'<sup>4</sup>

De Beauvoir not only adheres to the traditional, Western nature/culture dualism, she also fails to criticize the culture which she encourages women to enter. She fails to question the structure of this 'masculine world'; a failing in cultural criticism that flares up repeatedly in the theory of many liberal feminists. Liberal feminism is a tendency to take an uncritical look at the patricentric, anti-ecological pie. The proponents of NOW claim that we are all equal and thus we all deserve an equal serving of the societal pie, never questioning whether the pie is edible. An ERA advocate might justify becoming an executive in a hierarchical corporation by explaining simply that, "Anything the boys can do, girls can do . . .".

Like many liberal and socialist feminists who followed her, de Beauvoir felt that women's freedom will necessarily arise when we gain equal participation in the world of economic productivity.

It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distances that separate her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles. . . . When woman is productive, active, she regains her transcendence. . . .<sup>5</sup>

Finally, by implicitly maintaining the dualistic view that nature and culture are conflicting opposites, the liberal feminist also maintains the dualistic view that men and women are polarized opposites. Again, de Beauvoir sees man as the original creator of culture, and women as historically bound by her immanence. To make matters worse, the liberal feminist holds that the conflict between men and women will simply dissolve once women have transcended the realm of necessity.

As I will demonstrate later, profound dualisms rarely 'dissolve'. They are highly resistant and durable thought structures which feminist theory must continually challenge with ecological ways of looking at the world. It is clear that adherents to the tenets of NOW fail to work their way critically beyond gender dualism. Instead of creating an ecological theory of gender which emphasizes diversity and choice,

liberal feminists gloss over the historical dualism between the sexes, adopting what I will call 'cheap unity' or a state of bland androgyny. In this state, men and women are 'one' in that they are functionally equal and exchangeable in the economic sphere.

Having achieved the state of 'cheap unity', the liberal feminist now views any difference between the sexes which might impede women's access to functional 'oneness' with men to be deadly. In fact, liberal feminists view women's historical identification with nature as 'red tape' through which women must cut in order to gain access to the sphere of masculine productivity. The liberal feminist cuts this red tape and steps into a state of functional 'oneness' so that in the corporate workplace both sexes may look like their briefcases. Here, feminist theory remains within the dualistic, reductionist tradition. By sacrificing the diversity and distinctiveness which exists within and between the sexes for a generic androgyny, liberal feminism fails to transcend dualism.

Cultural feminism, the other general feminist theory that I will explore, also fails to advance beyond its underlying dualisms. Like liberal feminism, cultural feminism also reinforces the dualistic belief that culture is in opposition to a necessitarian nature. Articulated perhaps most audibly by theorists Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin and Sally Gearhart, cultural feminism holds that the present culture stands in opposition to a necessitarian female nature. Instead of regarding culture as the realm of freedom as does the liberal feminist, the cultural feminist maintains that the present culture negates a nature which abides by female natural laws.

The cultural feminist, in effect, believes that women may create a new, improved culture based on female natural law. The implicit nature philosophy within cultural feminism suggests that there exist certain inextricable female principles which women can know and incorporate in the creation of a radical women's culture. Women's 'innate' ability to cooperate, our increased ecological sensibility, and our peace-loving nature are simply a few of the female principles by which female nature abides. Interestingly, women who do not behave in accordance with these female principles are regarded as victims of patriarchal conditioning. No such distinction, it is worth noting, is made between patriarchally conditioned masculinity and biologically determined maleness. Men are viewed as branded by 'innate' male principles, such as competitiveness, aggression, war-like sensibility, and an overdeveloped rationality. This male nature is seen in essentialist terms as existing independently and prior to patriarchal conditioning.<sup>6</sup>

The cultural feminist separates herself from the male culture which is seen as governed by male principles, and commits herself to creating

a culture which expresses her innate, true nature. For the cultural feminist, freedom is no longer a transcendence of the laws of nature as in the case for the liberal feminist. Instead, freedom becomes a recognition of necessity, an acceptance and even a reverence for natural law. Here, women must recognize the necessity of female natural law in order to gain their freedom.

Mary Daly, in her fascinating work, *Cybernetics*, proclaims:

The spring into free space, which is woman-identified consciousness involves a veritable mental/behavioral mutation. The phallogocentric categories of good and evil no longer apply when women honor women.<sup>7</sup>

According to Daly, if woman takes this leap into 'free space' by aligning her consciousness with female nature, then the values of patricentric culture will necessarily dissolve. Later in the text, Daly suggests that woman's 'original source' is inherently different from that of man. She suggests that by realigning consciousness to fit female nature, woman will 'release the inherent dynamic in the mother-daughter relationship towards friendship which is strangled in the male mastered system.'<sup>8</sup> The language that Daly chooses reflects her bias towards a metaphysical and rigidly necessitarian view of nature. Words like 'mutation', 'original source' and 'inherent dynamic' all resound with a belief in a scientific and inextricable natural law.

In her novel, *Our Blood*, Andrea Dworkin further delineates female and male natures as strictly necessitarian. She describes male sexual sensibility as that which is 'aggressive, competitive, objectifying, quantity oriented.'<sup>9</sup> The concluding paragraph of the book declares that 'only when manhood is dead—and it will perish when a ravaged femininity no longer sustains it—only then will we know what it is to be free.'<sup>10</sup> According to Dworkin, 'ravaged femininity' or the repressed female principle will necessarily advance into a 'realm of freedom'. Again, freedom consists in the realization of female natural law.

Sally Gearhart presents her vision of cultural feminism in a utopian novel, *The Wanderground*. Gearhart lays out a lesbian separatist world of 'hillwomen' who have decided to create their own community away from the evils of the city men. In this world, even the men who have also embraced the female principle, called 'gentles', are still to be avoided. In the following passage, one hillwoman discusses a gentle's understanding of the necessary separation of the sexes.

Even beneath his cultivated hard exterior she could feel his understanding of the essential fundamental knowledge: women and men

cannot yet, may not ever, love one another without violence; they are no longer of the same species.<sup>11</sup>

Again, for Gearhart there is something necessarily violent within male nature from which women must separate. Women and men, as separate species, may not coexist within the same culture; when men are left to themselves, male nature necessarily creates a violent culture, and female nature necessarily creates a utopia.

This dualistic view of gender gives rise to even more theoretical difficulties. The cultural feminist can 'resolve' differences between the two 'species' through segregation. Yet how does the cultural feminist 'resolve' differences within the female species? Mary Daly's solution for gender differences is 'Mister-Ectomy'<sup>12</sup> (a complete separation from the 'mister') yet Daly says very little about how to address the very diverse body of women once we have achieved the 'post-Mister-Ectomy' era. Like many other cultural feminists, Daly glosses over a problematic and potentially liberating analysis of diversity among women of different races, personal traits, talents, and proclivities. Like many liberal feminists, the cultural feminist purchases 'cheap unity' to achieve oneness within the women's community. This 'cheap unity' represents the dualistic fall-out which lingers when dualism itself is not transcended.

Specifically, the cultural feminist purchases a female 'oneness' à la *Wanderground*. This '*Wanderground* oneness' is a state of affairs where women suddenly transcend all cultural and racial differences to form an all-female whole. The cultural feminist tendency toward 'cheap unity' is equally as lethal as the bland androgyny espoused by the liberal feminist; both positions purchase 'unity' at any price. Once again, differences, which should be articulated and celebrated, are glossed over, and 'unity' acts as a smokescreen for an underlying monistic reductionism. Unfortunately, '*Wanderground* oneness' cannot accommodate the very real factionalization within the women's community; tensions between women of different sexual orientations, race, and political persuasion continue to fester, preventing the unity which might be achieved if these feminists adopted a libertarian view of nature which incorporates diversity.

The need for a radical eco-feminist view of nature based on social ecology becomes increasingly clear when we look at the way in which both liberal and cultural feminism address the 'woman and nature' analogy. Both liberal and cultural feminism accept the traditional belief as a necessary given that women are 'more' connected to nature than men, differing only in their opinions as to whether to sever or revere this 'special' connection. To repeat: the idea that women are closer to nature than men stems from the dualisms between men and women,

nature and culture. Again, men maintain a monopoly on culture while women maintain a monopoly on nature.

The woman and nature analogy is reinforced by the Western, dualistic myth of 'transcendence'. As explained earlier, this myth holds that mankind may transcend the realm of nature by entering the realm of culture. In so doing, man severs his connection to nature, leaving woman behind with her 'monopoly' on the natural world. According to the myth of transcendence, nature is a world that is completely set apart from and opposed to man, an alien substance to which certain subjects are more or less connected. Whereas white men, who are presumably 'closer' to this transcendental world of culture, have fewer connections to nature, peoples of the 'Third World' who live in less proximity to white Western culture are supposed to be more connected to nature. Finally, women make up the general category of subjects who are 'most' connected to nature: in fact, as the myth contends, women do not even participate in the building of culture.

The belief that certain subjects are more 'connected' to nature than others is basically dualistic and patently reflects a lack of an ecological sensibility. The study of a social ecology shows us that all beings within an ecocommunity\* are interconnected. The possibility of life is grounded in the fact that all living, and pre-organic life forms exist in an interdependent relationship out of which emerges ever new, differentiated, and complex life forms. The Western idea that connectedness is quantifiable reflects an inability to fully grasp the concept of interconnectedness. When we recognize that we live in a world where all subjects are always interconnected, the question of being 'more' or 'less' connected reveals itself as absurd. What is ultimately at issue is the ways in which *all* life forms are interconnected.

The myth of 'quantifiable connectedness' and the myth of 'transcendence' constitute two different sides of the same dualistic coin. The logic of this dualism runs as follows:

1. There exist two separate, indeed, utterly antagonistic worlds.
2. Certain subjects may separate themselves from one of these worlds.
3. Thus, there are some subjects who will be more 'inherently connected' to one of these worlds than other subjects.

It is precisely this kind of dualistic, almost genetic way of thinking

\*I use the word 'ecocommunity' instead of 'ecosystem' deliberately. As Bookchin has pointed out, 'ecosystem' tends to connote a systems theory version of nature, 'Community' more accurately emphasizes the organic, indeed dialectical, nature of animal-plant interrelationships and preserves the symbiotic character of natural evolution.

which has nourished the present ecological crisis. The problem is that we simply do not think ecologically.

Past and current feminist theory has lacked the necessary ecological, critical analysis of the woman/nature question. In keeping with most social theorists who regard any kind of individual, cultural, or racial difference as problematic, feminist theorists have also regarded woman's 'difference' as a 'problem to solve'. It is bad enough that feminists even attempt to 'solve' such a 'problem'. What makes matters worse, however, is that the solutions which these women deduce are often dualistic or reductionistic. A radical eco-feminist critique of the woman/nature question must articulate a way to break through this dualistic impasse. Once we go beyond dualism or reductionism, we will see that the distinctive relationship between woman and nature is not a problem to be solved. Rather, we will recognize it as a dynamic relationship to be understood developmentally, while critically examining both the liberatory and oppressive implications of woman's difference for feminist theory and praxis.

If we apply the ecological principles of unity in diversity to our understanding of woman's difference, we may broaden our concept of difference altogether. We must understand woman's identity not only in terms of what makes woman different from man, but also we must look at what makes woman different from non-human nature. Once we have addressed the latter question, we will begin to understand the potentialities and proclivities that woman also shares with man as part of the human species.

First, let's apply the principle of unity in nature to woman's difference by exploring the unifying principles within human nature. Such principles constitute a common natural history shared by both men and women; this history is characterized by the emergence of several distinctive possibilities which distinguish human from non-human nature. Foremost, woman, as the female expression of human nature, shares with man the capacity to build a 'second nature'. This second nature includes the distinctly human potential to create cultural institutions, a written language, and the capacities for rational thought, intellectual mentation, and self-conscious reflection. The first answer to the 'woman question' must be that woman represents a distinctive expression of second nature: a nature which is the realization of the potential for self-consciousness in 'first nature' (non-human nature). When feminists focus exclusively on woman's difference from man, we cheat ourselves from our evolutionary inheritance, our very birth-right to a distinctive role in natural history. We focus so exclusively on that which makes a transcendental, 'female nature' distinctive that we forget to appreciate that which makes female human nature distinctive. The history of much of feminist theory has been a series of

'transvaluations of values', to use Nietzsche's term, in which the oppressed merely decide to value the antithesis of the oppressor's values instead of critically examining and integrating what is essentially valuable. Simply because Western, patricentric society overvalues rationality does not imply that women must reject the very quality which distinguishes humans from the rest of nature. Recognizing our unity, or commonality, with the male portion of human nature, allows us to recognize and celebrate that which has been denied to us for centuries: our historically unprecedented potentiality for critical self-conscious reflection which is so necessary for developing an objective, eco-feminist ethics.

Once we have explored the principle of unity within woman's difference, we open up the possibility of creating a 'fuller' feminism, one which recognizes the widest scope of woman's potential for fulfilling her role as the expression of female second nature. Now we may apply the principle of diversity in nature, by looking within second nature as a whole to understand the qualities of female second nature which render it, 'diverse', or distinctive from male second nature. We may now understand woman's difference from male second nature not in terms of an enhanced connection to nature, but in terms of a dynamic and developmental relationship to nature. Woman emerges both individually and historically out of first nature in such a way that allows woman to develop an enhanced, often implicit awareness of our interconnected relationship to the natural world. For many different biological and social reasons, male second nature did not historically fulfil its potential for developing this primary awareness of intersubjectivity. Instead, mankind has largely become increasingly dualistic and reductionistic in its thinking and in its way of relating to the world.

It is crucial at this point to emphasize the importance of the word 'tendency' which I so carefully choose to describe the association of enhanced ecological awareness with women. The connection between woman and this awareness is in no way indicative of natural law. I am deliberately describing an inclination, an evolutionary choice which many women have made on an unconscious level. I am pointing to what countless anthropologists and psychologists have described as female empathy. According to Nancy Chodorow, many women exhibit this enhanced relational capacity, this enhanced empathy for other living things. This capacity is correlated both to woman's potential for motherhood and to woman's identification with her own mother.<sup>13</sup> In both instances, woman either experiences an empathetic bond with her young, or she identifies with others in whom she observes this empathy.

Although biological proclivities have been overemphasized by advocates of biological determinism, an understanding of the cultural impli-

cations of such proclivities may give us much information about diversity within the human species. Anthropologist Sherwood Washburn points to the prolonged maturation period of the human infant as a factor in shaping the empathetic relationship between the human mother and her young.

The human mother-child relationship is as unique among the primates as is the use of tools. In all apes and monkeys the baby clings to the mother; to be able to do so, the baby must be born with its central nervous system in an advanced state of development. But the brain of the fetus must be small enough so that the birth may take place. . . . This obstetrical dilemma was solved by delivery of the fetus at a much earlier state of development. But this was only possible because the mother could hold the helpless infant. . . . Bipedalism, tool use, and selection for large brains thus slowed human development and invoked far greater maternal responsibility.<sup>24</sup>

Because the human infant is unable to 'cling' to the mother for survival, the human mother must 'cling' to her young. Historically, an infant's survival has depended on the ability of the social unit to provide the mother with a supportive net of cooperative social relationships. It is perhaps out of this proclivity in the mother to care for her underdeveloped infant, and out of the necessity for a cooperative social unit, that a female ethics of care has emerged.

It is essential to note that the prolonged 'clinging period' of the human mother to her young does not necessitate an ethics of care, nor does it entail an enhanced awareness of intersubjectivity. Motherhood, as a biological event, does not necessarily entail any of these empathetic traits. A true application of the principle of diversity to women's difference requires us to see that each individual woman represents a unique and ongoing development out of her own biological and cultural origins. Certainly, there are empathetic women who choose not to have children, men who are empathetic, and many mothers who do not express their potential for empathetic bonding. Further, many women have accepted the myth of transcendence: notably women in the liberal feminist tradition. Thanks to the NOW movement, more and more women have been struck by corporate-induced cases of empathetic bankruptcy.

Diversity within the human species, or woman's difference, is a crucial issue for eco-feminism. As women recognize and develop our distinctive awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, we begin to see nature as a realm of potential, indeed developing, freedom. We see that in nature all living beings participate together in making unconscious and, even in a rudimentary sense, conscious choices in

their own evolution. Nature, when revealed to be a variegated, interconnected web, becomes active, creative, and participatory. Women will begin to show that natural evolution is a surprisingly free process, not completely subdued by a natural law which has been used to justify our very own oppression. Informed by a *social* ecology, women may develop an ecological standpoint which will radicalize our view of evolution; revealing that evolution is in great part a self-determined process in which all subjects participate together, expressing the infinite latent potentialities for development in the natural world.

When we look at the dimensions of unity and diversity within the woman/nature relationship, we begin to recognize woman's distinctive role as the expression of both second nature and female second nature. Now we may begin to appreciate woman's unique opportunity to become the historical subject of an era which so direly needs an objective, social ethics as well as an ecological, empathetic ethics of care. Woman may be the subject who creates the theory and the movement which finally renders nature critically self-conscious. We will realize this possibility when we develop an ecological, empathetic consciousness which is mediated and fulfilled by woman's distinctively human capacity for objective, rational thought.

As eco-feminists become conscious of the connections between historical thought structures and historical actions, we will increase the complexity of our thought structures and will act in a manner which reflects a consciousness of the interconnectedness of life. Thinking ecologically allows us to interact in the world in such a way as to enhance the ecocommunity. A radical eco-feminist revolution begins by moving from dual-logic to eco-logic.

To go beyond dualism, feminists must enhance the complexity of our own thought structures. We need to realize that historically, we as a species have not as yet fulfilled our potential to enhance the interconnectedness of the natural world. To a degree that I hate to admit, patricentric society has reduced our awareness of ecological complexity to rigid, dualistic, and reductionistic thought structures. The effects of such a society can be seen in much of feminist theory which, as I have shown, has unknowingly absorbed such reductionist tendencies.

Our perceptions and cognitions define the shape of our interactions with the world. As eco-feminists, we cannot think reductively and dualistically. Radical eco-feminism entails a revolution in the way we think about nature. We are revolting against a brand of thinking which has simplified our top soil, forests, and air and has simplified our community structures. Hierarchy, patriarchy, the centralization of power, and capitalism are all consequences of having lived out the

myth of transcendence. As radical eco-feminists, we know that we can no longer enjoy the luxury of thinking simplistically. When feminists reduce 'woman' to a purely culturally or biologically constructed being, we help to perpetuate the perennial, socially constructed struggle between culture and nature. When liberal feminists focus exclusively on the equality of woman's rational capacities, and cultural feminists focus exclusively on the superiority of woman's empathetic capacities, feminist theory and practice is deprived of the wholeness which we will achieve when we begin to see culture and nature as existing on a developmental continuum, with the former possessing the potential to fulfil the latter. We must go beyond this struggle by integrating the liberal feminist's love for the human capacity for equality, rationality, and excellence, with the cultural feminist's love for woman's distinctive empathetic capacities. As well, we must never forget to include the cultural feminist's deliciously ferocious critique of patricentric society; such an omission would take out of feminism the essential bite which the radical phase of feminism delivered.

Radical eco-feminism incorporates and develops beyond the two previous feminisms by seeing culture not as separate from nature but as a development out of nature. Culture becomes the 'realm of freedom' not because it triumphs over nature, but because it actualizes potentialities that are latent within nature. Human beings are born of and live in the natural world. We are, as Griffin says, "Nature seeing nature.. nature with a concept of nature . . .".<sup>15</sup> Our evolution is inextricably interconnected to the evolution of all other subjects in the world.

Thinking through and beyond dualism means realizing that nothing is separate from the 'natural world'. The pencil that I write with, a star a million light years away, a plastic bag—all are interconnected with each other in the natural world regardless of the aesthetic, cultural, or economic values we choose to assign to them. It is essential to realize, however, that just because something is 'natural' or 'interconnected' does not mean it is necessarily life-enhancing. The AIDS virus is a 'natural' event, as is the famine in Ethiopia. Although some Deep Ecologists might disagree, I posit that such natural events do not enhance the complexity and diversity of the natural world. In fact, such 'natural' events reflect the actions of a society which is much more committed to social domination and economic profit than to ecological life-enhancement. Thinking ecologically entails rejecting a 'biological egalitarianism' which would grant the AIDS virus rights equal to those of human life.

As we develop an objective ecological ethics, we will begin to appraise the value of natural events in terms of their ability to enhance the diversity and complexity of the ecocommunity. Such an ethics would make explicit the value of finding a cure for AIDS and of

giving aid to the peoples of Ethiopia whose culture has been rendered unsustainable by imperialistic efforts.

Similarly, cultural constructs themselves, as part of a natural continuum, should be explored for their potentiality to increase or decrease complexity in the ecocommunity. For example, it is clear that patricentric cultures which are hierarchical do not enhance the complexity of social life in the same way as an eco-libertarian culture based on social ecology. Patricentric cultures centralize power and decrease the number of active participants in the political structure to a few, élitist figures and bureaucratic agencies. In contrast, eco-libertarian cultural forms may enhance the complexity of political structures by encouraging active participation of all individuals and more rounded communities. There is an actual recycling of power in an eco-libertarian political group: consensus itself requires that each individual take full responsibility for the decision of the group, ensuring a greater distribution of decision-making power and democracy.

As self-conscious women who have lived to seek out the implications of dualistic thought structures, we have come to a point where we may now choose to create a culture which will be life-affirming. Again, radical eco-feminism proposes a non-dualistic, non-reductionistic, indeed dialectical view of nature. When we think dialectically, we see that those phenomena which might appear to be 'opposites' through the eyes of dualism are truly complementary subjects out of which may arise new, even more complex subjects. It is the developmental relationship between different subjects which fosters evolution and complexity. When we think dialectically, with an ecological sensibility, we see that difference does not necessitate conflict. Difference represents an opportunity for creative integration. Dialectical relationships constitute a continual process of becoming which is completely open-ended. This open-endedness is freedom.

As we begin to radicalize our view of nature, we may also generate a radical eco-feminist culture, politics, and a new feminist spiritual sensibility which embodies the complexity and diversity of the natural world. First, we must explore the possibility of building a woman-identified culture and politics which does not need to appeal to natural law for validation. If there is no 'female nature' carved in stone, then we must find a new ground for a woman-identified culture. In fact, we might rethink what feminine nature is? I propose that a woman-identified culture celebrate not a feminine nature determined by natural law but a feminine nature constituted of the distinctive experiences of each individual woman in the collectivity. The feminine principle represents a tendency toward a distinctive feminine experience, which

is grounded on objective self-directiveness, not on a 'lawful' determinism.

We must articulate the infinite and different evolutionary choices which each woman makes within the context of her own biological and cultural set. We may celebrate the larger tendencies within women's collective history, a celebration which will strengthen our sense of a collective identity and unity. However, we must be ready at all times to look beneath these larger 'feminine' tendencies discussed earlier to see that the very complex and diverse web of woman's shared experience is composed of individual women. Each woman chooses, responds, and evolves in her own distinctive way.

A radical eco-feminist culture draws on the distinctive, larger tendencies within woman's shared history, holding sacred those feminine values which have been misinterpreted as being exclusively biologically determined. Women's tendencies toward cooperation, nurturance, and interdependence are all qualities which we may choose to emulate and incorporate into a woman-identified culture. For example, we may study and celebrate the 'hersstory' of woman's art, literature, and music. Cultural feminists have done much to reclaim and revive our unwritten cultural past. Thanks to women like Mary Daly and Susan Griffin, women now have an enriched awareness of woman's past and of the bravery of our 'uppity' foremothers. Because of the women's music movement, we have reclaimed an awareness and appreciation for woman's ability to work together to create music celebrating woman's shared experience.

But we also need to create a larger woman's community; a cross-cultural, even global, community of women. While celebrating the rich diversity of our lives throughout the world, we cannot afford to let our distinctiveness alienate us from each other. As Ynestra King suggests, we must create face-to-face dialogue between women of different nations.<sup>16</sup> We need to learn more about the diversity of our experience as well as our shared experience. The planet is growing smaller: because the universal effects of nuclear technology affect us all, we must use this new awareness to develop an acute sensitivity to how all of our political actions and decisions impact women in different lands. Women must bond together to gain strength and support to fight for the life of the planet we all share as a species.

In order to be free to create a woman-identified culture, women need to fight against the culturally induced fear of bonding which has separated women historically. Women may look to lesbianism as a model for women bonding, and we must constantly fight against the homophobia which tries to prevent this bonding.<sup>17</sup> Each woman must be prepared, if only symbolically, to call herself a 'lesbian', regardless of her sexual preference. In World War Two, the King of Denmark

rode through the streets wearing a Jewish star on a band around his arm. By doing this, the king declared that all people must be willing to call themselves Jews in order for all people to reclaim their freedom. In this same way, we must 'de-spook' lesbianism, as Mary Daly might so cleverly say. All women must make it clear that women no longer need fear societal retribution for loving women. Until all women feel pride in wearing a pink triangle around their arms, no women will be free to love women without inhibition.

Lastly, eco-feminists must continue in the struggle to reclaim ownership of our own bodies. As expressions of nature, our bodies too represent the realm of freedom and choice. Women are reclaiming the right to be midwives, healers, and mothers when and if we choose. We are fighting for the right to choose safe and free abortions, and for the right to have access to affordable birth control. In this way, we will increase the spectrum of choices for our own lives.

As we open up human nature as the 'realm of potential freedom' and choice, we can begin to develop an eco-feminist ethics on which to ground a political culture. In short, we must be committed to 'reweaving' the web of our political structures. As Murray Bookchin so brilliantly declares, an ecological ethics is one based on a broad web of participation.

A politics of participation is a politics that fosters self-empowerment rather than state empowerment. Such a politics must become a truly people politics, organic in the sense that political participation is literally protoplasmic and peopled by assemblies, face-to-face discussion that is reinforced by the veracity of body language as well as the reasoning process of discourse. The political ethics that follows from this ground is meant to create a moral community, not simply an "efficient" one; an ecological community, not simply a contractual one; a social praxis that enhances diversity, not only a political culture that invites the widest public participation.<sup>18</sup>

A moral politics springs from an ecological ethics. We must create an objective ground for determining the ethical value of our political actions so that 'life-affirmingness' becomes a yardstick by which we can measure the ethical content of our political actions.

When we think ecologically, we realize that we must continually challenge homophobia; for we see that homophobia limits the spectrum of human choice and diversity. When challenged by an ecological ethics, we realize that homophobia is life-negating, and thus ethically unsound. In the same way, we see that we must fight against racism, because it represents a desire to degrade the racial diversity of the

human species; racism, as a form of reductionism, is also life-negating. It is essential to fight against nuclear technology because of the destructive effects that radiation has on the ecocommunity. Cancer, eventual genetic mutations, and the production of plutonium used by a few men in centralized governments to maintain their dominant positions in the global hierarchy all reflect a deadly reductionist menace.

We must weigh each political concern carefully to make sure that our goal is to increase ecological-political diversity and participation. As we radicalize our view of nature, we radicalize our view of culture; soon the concept of natural law in its reductionist form will become anachronistic, and we will replace the political structures legitimated by a hierarchical view of nature with a politics derived from a participatory view of nature. To facilitate this shedding away of the old view of nature, we may build a society which is 'reproductive' rather than simply 'productive'. We need to create alternatives to the production-consumption syndrome which drags us closer to ecocide. In our present culture, the processes of both production and consumption function to simplify the ecocommunity. An ecological culture is a reproductive culture where consumption becomes as nutritive as production. The process of consumption must enter into the ecological domain as a mode of enhancing the fecundity of the ecocommunity. As we radicalize our view of consumption, we will develop a sense of ecological responsibility in which all our actions are measured by their ability to increase the fertility of our cultural soil. Just as sexual reproduction can increase the diversity and stability of a gene pool, a philosophy of creative consumption can increase the diversity and stability of our social and ecological relations.

In order to transform our society into an ecological one, we must take direct action. As radical eco-feminists, our politics should be microcosmic expressions of the kind of eco-libertarian society we want to live in. Our direct action must express social ecology's principles of unity in diversity, and the principle of the interconnectedness of life. Our actions should embody the creative, the imaginative and the wrathful, as well as the rational. When I think of direct action, I am reminded of the actions performed by women in both the Seneca and Greenham Common peace encampments. Women weaving colorful pieces of their lives through the barbed wire fences, women helping each other to climb over these walls, women stringing balls of yarn through the trees, police cars, and guns—spinning webs of color that represent our interconnectedness with each other. Eco-action expresses the caprices of a free nature, by showing that we will no longer submit to governmental rule which is legitimated by a hierarchical conception of natural law. I would want our actions to show that we are prepared to go

beyond an anachronistic politics by creating a more courageous, ecological politics.

Moving beyond anachronistic cognitive and cultural forms opens up the possibility of exploring a new spirituality. As we recognize the dimension of freedom in nature, we might begin to imagine what a spiritual sensibility might be like which does not appeal to a dualistic, hierarchical authority for validation. We might begin to wonder if it is possible to think of an objective, rational ground for spirituality without maintaining the dualistic split between creator and created? What does it mean to think of a nature which is self-creating, a nature which is self-directive? Evolution itself shows us that there is in nature a directiveness toward increasing levels of complexity and diversity within an ecocommunity, that there is a dimension of objective reason in the open-ended horizon toward which nature strives.

And yet, we should never confuse this self-directiveness with transcendental determinism. We cannot look at a leaf and say, 'It could never have been but this way.' Rather, we should look at a leaf and reflect upon the interconnected beings in nature which participated in expressing the potentiality which this leaf represents. There is a rudimentary measure of 'reasonableness' in nature. Nature is 'rational' in its directiveness, yet nature is open-ended. It is this open horizon which may constitute the ground for a new, ecological spirituality.

An ecological spirituality represents a celebration of the interconnectedness of all life and also the distinctiveness of each life form. Respecting species' distinctiveness entails that we do not put ourselves above or below nature; we do not glorify ourselves as transcendental beings over nature, nor do we glorify nature with false humility as something 'above us' or 'wiser' than us. An authentic ecological spirituality goes beyond a spirituality informed by a 'deep' ecology by celebrating the qualities which distinguish human nature from non-human nature as well as celebrating that which makes women different from men. An ecological spirituality informed by social ecology transcends a hierarchical view of nature, revealing the absurdity of professing a greater reverence for non-human life.

Because human nature has far from actualized its full potential for creating and sustaining a truly ecological relationship to both human and non-human nature, it is easy to comprehend why an anti-humanist stance would appear to be a rational stance to adopt. However, we must always look beneath the reality of human behavior to reveal the latent potentiality within human nature to actually enhance and fulfil the natural world. An ecological spirituality expresses an ability to celebrate and articulate the potentiality distinctive to the particularity of each life form.

Spirituality is an awareness and sensitivity that we bring with us to all aspects of our lives. As we derive from nature the ecological principles of interdependence, complementarity, and spontaneity, we may apply these principles to our personal relationships, our political structures, and into our communities. We can begin to create rituals and ceremonies which do not appeal to the 'super-natural'; rather, we can celebrate the arrival of a new relationship with the natural world—a relationship which we can experience with our senses and feel with our bodies. Once we recognize ourselves as deriving from nature, expressing the potential in nature for self-consciousness, we will no longer need to worship nature as something separate from ourselves. Once we have moved beyond dualism, the split between spirit and matter dissolves: we are left only with the sweet awareness that we are, after all, made from this earth.

Ritual itself can help us to demonstrate our new, ecological awareness. Through ritual, we shift our perception so that we become conscious of the liberatory potentialities in nature that are currently not part of our everyday lives. Ritual also helps us to experience and develop our sense of interconnectedness, allows us to make explicit the commitment in our relationships to nature and to each other. Women may create rituals which celebrate our historical and biological relationship to the cycles of the moon; we may derive from nature metaphors and images with which women can identify universally.

Once we see that there really are no rigid 'natural laws' that completely govern us, nature opens itself up before us as a world of patterns, symmetries, and complementary forms, all webbed together, developing in a direction which we can never completely map out, much less 'command'. Evolution itself, which we embody, is something which we may spiritually celebrate within ourselves. We should celebrate the potentiality, the unexpected, and the spontaneous expressed by human nature, just as we deal respectfully with human capacities for reason and self-directiveness.

Spirit is not confined to a gender or race, nor does it abide by feminine or masculine principles. Rather, spirit represents the flow of potentiality which exists naturally within the very texture of life. When we assign gender, color or status to our gods and goddesses, we commit idolatry. Symbols represent a transcendental world which is separate from nature. As Murray Bookchin observes, " "reverence" for nature, the mythologizing of the natural world over the human—all degrade nature by denying the natural world its universality as that which exists everywhere, free of all dualities like "spirit" and "god". . . . A "revered" nature is a separated nature in the bad sense of the term."<sup>19</sup>

Spiritualism, scientism, and a hypostatization of technology have all been used by man to finally control society as well as nature. Hierarchy, domination, and social oppression have continually appealed to these age-old 'fetters' for legitimization. As women who are now witnessing the implications of the historical errors of a dual-logic, we may enter a time when our personal, political and spiritual lives will appeal to eco-logic for validation; a logic which inheres in the very cells which compose us. Natural law, once meant to ease Western man's sense of discomfort when confronted by the complexity of the natural world, threatens to snap back at us if it is seen as the ubiquitous mode of explaining all phenomena. It threatens to fetter freedom and ultimately our freedom to act. I insist that a radical eco-feminism must revolutionize our view of nature and must arouse us to action. Women must generate a new eco-praxis grounded in social ecology if the natural world, as well as the social, is to survive.

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